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TO A PORTRAIT OF LORD BYRON

So . . . stand you there, George Gordon, where the sunlight
 Of the young day shall strike across your face,
 That I may quaff, as from a golden fountain,
 Each morning of its splendor and its grace.

You're dead how many years? a hundred nearly—
 And stilled is all the laughter, all the wrong
 Life and your own unreined bright spirit wrought you;
 The world to-day finds other ways of song.

And that's my puzzle—those new modes of singing—
 The Art without a canon and a law,
 The tyro strutting in the poet's vesture,
 The nightingale supplanted by the daw.

The apotheosis of the Unlasting
 With Color as a watchword on its lip—
 The chanting of the trivial and the common
 In khakied words that stumble, squawk and slip.

The fancy drunk with such experimenting
 Must from delirium into stupor grow—
 No man that lives may juggle with God's lightning
 And deem therefrom with unscathed soul to go.

You knew that—yes—and forged your hard-won knowledge
 Into great cantoed rhyming poems, where yet,
 With all its wars, its mockeries and splendors
 The living Europe of your day is set.

Too personal perhaps . . . that wild abandon
 That left unveiled no pang of soul or heart—
 Not even your best lover may uphold them
 As flawless models of a classic art.

But—all that pinioned rush of thoughts demanding
 Words—and Death waiting there to clip your years . . .
 What marvel if at times the Titan structure
 From all set rules of architecture veers.

And at the end remains this thing forever—
 This bastioned fortress reaching to the stars—
 Still from its turrets your sword-song outleaping
 To smite and shatter Freedom's prison-bars!

The great Idea to the great Word welded,
 The Thought torrential clothed in living rhyme:
 These were yours, Byron . . . would that Heaven send us
 Like poet-gifts to grace our land and time!

Eleanor Rogers Cox

